

THE FIRST BABY.

My old schoolfellow, Mary Thornley, had been married nearly two years when I made my first call on her in her capacity of a mother.

"Did you ever see such a darling?" she exclaimed, tossing the infant up and down in her arms. "There, baby, that ma's old friend, Jane. He knows you already, I declare," said the delighted parent, as it smiled at a bright ring which I held up to it. "You never saw such a quick child. He follows me with his eyes all about the room. Notice what pretty little feet he has, the darling footsy-tootsies;" and taking both feet in one hand, the mother fondly kissed them.

"It certainly is very pretty," said I, trying to be polite, though I could not perceive that the infant was more beautiful than a dozen others I had seen. "It has your eyes exactly, Mary."

"Yes, and da-da's mouth and chin," said my friend, apostrophising the child, "hasn't it, precious?" And she almost smothered it with kisses.

As I walked slowly homeward, I said to myself, "I wonder if, when I marry, I shall ever be so foolish. Mary used to be a sensible girl." In a fortnight afterwards I called on my friend again.

"How baby grows," she said; "don't you see it? I never knew a child grow so fast. Grand-ma' says it's the healthiest child she ever knew."

To me it seemed that the babe had not grown an inch; and, to avoid the contradiction, I changed the theme. But, in a moment, the doting mother was back to her infant again.

"I do believe it's beginning to cut its teeth," she said, "putting her finger into the little one's mouth. Just feel how hard the gum is there. Surely that's a tooth coming through. Grand-mother will be here to-day, and I'll ask her if it isn't so."

I laughed, as I replied, "I am entirely ignorant of such matters; but your child really seems a very fine one."

"Oh! yes; everybody says that. Pretty, pretty dear!" And she tossed it up and down, till I thought the child would have been shaken to pieces; but the little creature seemed to like the process very much. "Is it crowing at its mother? It's laughing is it? Tiny, niny, little dear. What a sweet precious it is!" And she finished by almost devouring it with kisses.

When I next called, the baby was still further advanced.

"Only think," said my friend, when I had made my way to the nursery, where she now kept herself from morning till night, "baby begins to eat. I gave it a piece of meat to-day—a bit of real broiled beefsteak."

"What!" said I, in my ignorance, for this did look wonderful, "the child eating beefsteak already?"

"Oh," laughed my friend, seeing my mistake, "what a sad dunce you are, Jane! But wait till you have babies of your own. She says you eat beefsteak, darling," added the proud mother, addressing the infant, "when you only suck the juice. You don't want to choke yourself, do you, baby? Eat a beefsteak! It's funny, baby, isn't it?" And again she laughed—laughing all the

more because the child sympathetically crowed in return.

It was not many weeks before the long-expected teeth really appeared.

"Jane, Jane, baby has three teeth!" triumphantly cried the mother, as I entered the nursery. "Three teeth, and he's only nine months old! Did you ever hear of the like?"

I confessed that I had not. The whole thing, in fact, was out of my range of knowledge. I knew all about Dante in the original, and a dozen other fine lady accomplishments; but nothing about babies teething.

"Just look at the little pearls!" exclaimed my friend, as she opened the child's mouth. "Are they not beautiful? You never saw anything so pretty—confess that you never did. Precious darling," continued the mother, rapturously hugging and kissing the child, "it is worth its weight in gold!"

But the crowning miracle of all was when "baby" began to walk. Its learning to creep had been duly heralded to me. So also had its being able to stand alone; though this meant, I found, standing with the support of a chair. But when it really walked alone, the important fact was announced to me in a note, for my good friend could not wait till I called.

"Stand there," she said to me in an exulting voice. "No, stoop. I mean; how can you be so stupid?" And, as I obeyed, she took her station about a yard off, holding the little one by either arm. "Now, see him," she cried, as he toddled towards me, and finally succeeded in gaining my arms, though once or twice I fancied he would fall, a contingency from which he was protected, however, by his mother holding her hands on either side of him, an inch or two off. "There, did you ever see anything so extraordinary? He's not a year old, either."

By this time I began to be considerably interested in "baby" myself. He had learned to know me, and would begin to crow whenever I entered the nursery; and I was, therefore, almost as delighted as my friend, when, for the first time, he pronounced my name. "Djane," he said, "Djane!"

His mother almost devoured him with kisses in return for this wonderful triumph of the vocal organs; and when she had finished, I, in turn, smothered him with caresses.

I never after that smiled, even to myself, at the extravagance of my friend's affection for her baby; the little love had twined himself around my own heart-strings. How could I?

And now that I am a mother myself, I feel less inclination still to laugh, as others may do, over that mystery of mysteries—a mother's love for her baby.